

Bureau Juvenile Justice Wilderness Instructors Supports Becoming an Outdoors Woman Program

Three Bureau of Juvenile Justice workers had a chance to showcase their unique technical expertise, as well as therapeutic skills recently when they taught rock climbing and rappelling to Michigan women in a cooperative effort with the Department of Natural Resources.

Wilderness Program Manager Steve Seager and Wilderness Instructors Todd Serby and Linda Walker conducted the class as part of the DNR-sponsored Becoming An Outdoors Woman program held in Big Bay June 2-4. Since 1994, BOW has sought to help women break down barriers to outdoor pursuits by teaching traditional skills, such as hunting and fishing, as well as by introducing new pursuits, such as kayaking or geocaching.

The rock climbing class debuted on the itinerary this year and filled completely. According to Ann Wilson of the DNR, participants noted the wilderness instructors' ability to build trust and coach women through an experience that was both "frightening and exhilarating."

"Many of the women have never had what some would consider an extreme outdoor experience," Wilson said. "It's that thing that challenges somebody, that brings out a new meaning of self and that we're trying to achieve with this program."

Rock climbing and rappelling are not only skills taught, but they also have an important therapeutic element for participants.

"It gives them the opportunity to reflect on personal growth, to look inside themselves and see how strong they can be," Seager said. "Hopefully, they'll transfer this new reflection of who they are into other parts of their life."

"Part of the challenge is not just doing the act, but being willing to have the courage to take the extra step to do something they've never done before and step outside of their comfort zone."

Seager, Serby and Walker use this experiential concept within wilderness programming and treatment at Nokomis Challenge Center in Prudenville. The residential program serves adolescent males who have been adjudicated in various counties throughout the state.

Proposed photo caption: Bureau of Juvenile Justice Wilderness Instructor Linda Walker assists a rock climbing student during the Becoming An Outdoors Woman program, sponsored by DNR.

